

AN
EXHORTATION
TO A
SERIOUS REFORMATION
OF
LIFE AND MANNERS.

BEING

The late Bishop of *London's*
FIFTH PASTORAL LETTER;

OCCASIONED

By the DANGERS that threatened this Nation
from the late Wicked and Unnatural
Rebellion.

THE SEVENTH EDITION.

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EXHORTATION

SERIOUS REFORMATION

LIFE AND A MANNER

THE LATE BISHOP OF LONDON

THOMAS BURNET

By the Bishop of London, who lived and died a Christian
from the late Bishop and Chancellor

THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON: Printed by T. B. 1734. No. 62.

AN
EXHORTATION

TO A
Serious Reformation of **LIFE** and
MANNERS, &c.

THE Occasion of my applying to you at this Time *, and in this way, is, to set before you some duties which God more particularly calls for and requires of us, in times of public danger and calamity. And, that what I have to offer to you may have the greater weight, I will enforce it by warnings and examples in the like case, as we find them recorded in the holy scriptures; which, in the words of St. Paul, (Rom. iv) "were written for our learning;" that is, to acquaint us, first, with God's ordinary methods of dealing with men and nations, whether in the way of judg-

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ment, or in the way of mercy; and then, to shew us the surest means of avoiding the one, and securing the other.

For this end, reason teaches, and God commands, that, in the first place, the best human means be made use of for safety and deliverance in the day of danger, and that we be earnest in prayer for a blessing upon those means, and for the success of them. To use means without prayer for the divine blessing, is an impious reliance upon our own wisdom and strength; and to pray without the use of human means, is a groundless and presumptuous expectation of assistance from God.

In this our day of danger, the best precautions have been used against the attempts of the enemy; and those precautions have been accompanied with the fervent prayers of pious and good christians, for a blessing upon them. But, as this is a national danger, there must be one step further, to give us a title to the aid and protection of God: I mean a national humiliation for sins, and a reformation of lives and manners; of the efficacy of which for deliverance from danger, and of the want of them as the forerunner of ruin and destruction, we have, as I said, many remarkable instances and examples in holy scripture. But, setting aside the authority of revelation, nothing can be more absurd in reason, than for a nation to expect aid and protection from God, while it continues in a course of open and unrestrained provocations against him; which, though the provo-

provocations of particular persons, may justly be accounted national in his sight, if they are open and flagrant, and yet unrestrained by publick authority.

This, it is true, belongs more immediately to the civil Magistrate; but there may be many and great irregularities both in particular persons and private families, which are not within the compass of his knowledge, nor within the reach of his authority, however heinous and provoking they may be in the sight of God. And therefore it is in vain to hope for a national reformation, unless private persons, who are under no direction but their own, can be persuaded to lay this matter to heart, and to take diligent heed to their own ways; and unless parents and masters will make a conscience of doing their part towards it, by exerting the authority which God has given them over their children and servants; remembering, that they are not only answerable to God for the sins and irregularities which are committed or connived at within our own walls, but are also answerable to their country for the share they take in bringing down the judgments of God upon it. Nations are made up, first of individuals, next of families, and lastly of bodies and communities; and when there is a hearty concurrence of all these in the great work of reformation, then, and not till then, it is truly national; and is the only effectual means of averting the judgments of God, and securing his protection in time of danger, and engaging

his aid and assistance for the safety and preservation of the whole.

I. Toward this great end, let every individual resolve to do his part, and to answer for one; by keeping himself clear from the vices of the age, and a religious attendance upon the holy ordinances, publick and private, which God has appointed, as a necessary guard to his innocence, against the manifold temptations to the violation of it, which are so frequently met with. And this I desire to press with the greater earnestness, because, on one hand, no person who seriously attends those holy ordinances, can be either ignorant or unmindful of his duty to God, and man, and himself; and, on the other hand, he who lives in the neglect of them, whatever knowledge he may have of his duty, will quickly lose both the sense and remembrance of it. And, in truth, it is chiefly owing to the habitual neglect of those ordinances by some, and a careless and formal attendance on them by others, that we see among us so much lukewarmness in religion; which does not stop there, but grows apace into an habitual disregard of it, and an unconcernedness about it. And besides the good and evil of attending or neglecting the ordinances of religion, in their effects, it ought to be further remembered, that a constant and serious attendance upon them, where there is no reasonable impediment, is enjoined in the gospel as a matter of strict duty; and that the joining in them with our christian brethren,

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has been considered by the church of Christ in all ages, as a necessary part of the Christian dispensation.

II. The next advance towards a national reformation, must be in families; where parents and masters, in their own persons, are equally concerned with all other individuals, in what is said under the last head. But their concern extends much further; first, as they have received power from God to direct and govern all those who are under their care and inspection; and then, as by the due exercise of that power, they, above all others, may contribute to the suppression of vice, and increase of religion, and by consequence, to a national reformation; and lastly, as this power is a talent put into their hands by God, for the neglect or abuse of which they stand accountable to him from whom they received it. Those who are under their care, are also under their eye; so that they cannot be ignorant of their behaviour, without a shameful degree of thoughtlessness, or rather stupidity, and an utter unconcernedness for religion. And as, without such habitual thoughtlessness and inattention, they cannot be ignorant of the behaviour of their children and servants, so neither can they be ignorant of their own duty in the government of them, if they will in any measure think of it, and attend to it.

The duty of parents with regard to their children, and the duty of masters with regard to their servants, however differing in other

An Exhortation to a

respects, are, as to our present consideration, much the same; that is, to restrain them from vice of all kinds, and to watch the first beginnings of it, and tendencies to it; to admonish and reprove, and to punish if it is found necessary; to instruct them in their duty, and lead them to the performance of it by a good example, which is the most forcible kind of instruction; and to oblige them to a due attendance on the worship of God, both publick and private, and to a regular observation of the Lord's-day. Here is no difficulty in all this, if parents and masters have a heart to the work, and are regular in their own lives, and will consider withal, 'How great service they may be daily doing to God and their country; 'How greatly they will be rewarded in the next life for a conscientious discharge of this important duty; and 'How severely punished for the neglect of it.' Nor is either the reward or punishment to be wondered at, when it is considered, that the one is daily laying a foundation of virtue and piety, and the other a foundation of vice and profaneness, not only for their own time, but the next and following generations.

I am willing to hope, that these duties, and the considerations proper to enforce them, will be seriously attended to and laid to heart by parents and masters, for their own sake, and for the sake of God and his religion; and at this time, particularly, out of a just concern for the present and future safety and happiness
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of these kingdoms; being well assured, that without a national reformation, we can neither be happy, nor safe; and that nothing can so effectually contribute to both, as a due regulation in families, under the conduct and direction of their heads and governors; as described above.

III. From the case of families, as having it in their power to contribute greatly to a national reformation, we will proceed, with the same view, to bodies and communities. And here it is, that the business of the magistrate begins. By magistrates, I mean all those who are vested with civil authority; those for whom we pray in our publick Liturgy, "that they may truly and indifferently minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of God's true religion and virtue."

It is the proper province of ministers of the gospel, to labour against vice and wickedness, by reason and argument, by doctrine and example, by publick exhortation and private admonition. But if men will harden themselves against all these, and having cast off a sense of shame as well as a sense of duty, will let themselves loose into a course of impiety and wickedness, and an open indulgence in any notorious sin, they then become fit objects of the minister of justice; whose proper business it is, as laid out by the Apostle, (Rom. xiii. 3, 4.) to be "a terror to evil works," and "not to bear the sword in vain;" considering

ing himself as the "minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil." And, in order to this, he is obliged, within his proper sphere, to watch against the growth of open wickedness of every kind, and by all proper means to discourage it, and, if need be, to restrain and punish it by a vigorous execution of those wholesome laws which the legislature has provided against it. And all this from a sense of the duty which he owes to the publick, and in obedience to God, whose providence has entrusted him with power, and to whose justice he must be accountable for the use and exercise of it; especially in cases which concern God's honour, and the maintaining his religion in the world, against vice and profaneness. And the greater the regularity is, which magistrates, as well as ministers, do themselves preserve and maintain in private life, the greater weight their admonitions and authority must have, and the greater their strength will be, for the suppressing of vice, and promoting the same regularity, in their respective stations.

IV. For these great ends the legislature have done their part, from time to time, by enacting laws against drunkenness, swearing, and cursing, open lewdnesses and debaucheries, blasphemy and profaneness, and the profanation of the Lord's-day. But what shall we say to the execution? when, to our shame be it spoken, the violation of the laws, and the neglect of punishing it, are, in many places, equally

equally notorious. And this notoriety in both, namely, open wickedness, unrestrained and unpunished, is that which may be properly called a national guilt. As long as the corruptions of nature are working within, and are favoured with a variety of temptations without, there will be much sin and wickedness in the world, which the best means and endeavours of parents and masters, ministers and magistrates, cannot prevent; and so far particular persons must be answerable to God for their own sins. But if a nation does not use the proper means and endeavours to restrain it, but on the contrary seems unconcerned about it, and suffers the laws for opposing and suppressing it to be laid asleep; by such a general supineness and neglect, the guilt becomes national, and exposes the whole to the wrath and judgments of God.

And if such should be found to be the case of our own nation, as I doubt it has been too much so for years past, it behoves us to enquire betimes, what are the most effectual means of removing the guilt, and averting the judgments of God; especially in a time of publick danger, and when we see the judgments coming towards us; and hanging over our heads.

V. In this enquiry, we can have no surer guide than the various instances of God's dealing with kingdoms and nations, in the way of judgment, and in the way of mercy; as we find them set down in the holy scriptures.

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The Old Testament abounds with the threatnings of God against a sinful and disobedient people; with declarations of what they were to expect, if they did not repent and reform. Of this sort, among many others, are his messages to the nation of the Jews, by the prophet Jeremiah, just before his sending them into captivity.

“Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.” Jerem. vi. 6.

“Because ye have done all these works, and I spake unto you, but you heard not; and I called you but ye answered not: Therefore I will cast you out of my sight.” Jerem. vii. 13, 15.

And in the New Testament, where St. Paul enumerates the judgments of God upon the people of Israel, for their provocations in the Wilderness; he presses those examples upon the Corinthians, as the most forcible argument to deter them from venturing upon the like provocations. 1 Cor. x. 6. “Now, these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted;” and ver. 11. “Now, all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition.”

But besides the threatnings and inflictions of temporal judgments in the Old Testament, we find a threatening in the New, which, though

though of another kind, must appear to every sincere Christian to be most terrible. It is our Saviour's message to the church of Ephesus, by his servant St. John, (Rev. ii. 5.) "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent;" that is, I will take from thee the pure light of the Gospel, which thou hast hitherto enjoyed. And does it not nearly concern the people of this land, seriously to consider and lay to heart the unhappiness and misery of having the light of the scriptures taken from them, as to all the purposes of instruction and edification; (while they are in a language which they are neither able, nor allowed to read;) and themselves left to be guided by the traditions of men, instead of the commandments of God; and further required, upon pain of damnation, to embrace traditional doctrines which have not only no authority from scripture, our only true rule, but have a direct tendency to poison and eat out the very vitals of christianity. And after it has been seriously considered how terrible such a judgment would be, let it be always remembered, what our Saviour tells the church of Ephesus, as the only means of preventing and escaping it, viz. "except ye repent."

And for our encouragement to take that course, as the sure means of being delivered from

from judgments, whether temporal or spiritual, let us also remember the gracious declaration which God made to his people by the same prophet that denounced his judgments.

“At what instant,” says God, “I shall speak concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it.”

“If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” Jerem. xviii. 7, 8.

Which readiness in God to spare and deliver upon repentance and reformation, is most remarkably exemplified in his dealing with the Ninevites. The prophet Jonah was sent to them, with this message, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown:” and then it follows:

“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not.” Jonah iii. 4, 5, 10.

Thus hath God, in the language of Moses to the children of Israel, set before us Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing, (Deut. xi. 26. xxx. 19.) And may the same God grant, that in the language of our blessed Saviour, we may (Luke xix. 42.) “know at least in

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“ this our day, the things which belong unto
“ our peace, before they be hid from our
“ eyes.” This is the hearty desire and ear-
nest prayer of

Your faithful Friend and Pastor,

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